

That was more than a year ago, and yet Amir's family still has little clue as to his fate. Amir has been held for much of his captivity in solitary confinement. He has not been granted access to his Iranian attorney and has been allowed only limited contact with family. Switzerland, which oversees U.S. interests in Iran, has not been granted consular access to him.

There is no evidence that Amir was engaged in any espionage activity while visiting his family in Iran. There is every reason to believe—including the ruling of the Iranian Supreme Court—that the information used against Amir in his original trial was deeply flawed. A videotaped “confession” broadcast on Iranian television was obviously edited. Iranian officials have yet to make clear what charges, if any, Amir faces, or when he might be re-tried on those charges, even though more than a year has passed since his original sentence was overturned. Humanitarian and human rights groups including Amnesty International have called for Amir's release. So have a number of U.S.-based Islamic organizations, including Islamic Circle of North America, Islamic Society of North America, Muslim Public Affairs, Council, Council on American-Islamic Relations of Michigan, the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan, Islamic House of Wisdom, the Muslim Center of Detroit and the Michigan Muslim Community Council.

Recently, Amir's family has received some limited communication with him. He has been able to send them letters, and an uncle in Iran has been given permission to visit Amir in prison. This limited contact has been welcome, but has only increased the family's desire to secure Amir's return. This desire is all the stronger because Amir's father, a college professor in Flint, has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Ali Hekmati faces his illness wondering if he will ever again be able to see his son. Islamic and universal principles of compassion and mercy argue for his release.

Our two nations have wide differences of opinion, many of them longstanding, others which have emerged more recently. But innocent citizens of both our nations should not be caught up in matters of state. I urge the Iranian government to recognize the humanitarian necessity of releasing Amir Hekmati and returning him to the Michigan family that has missed him for so long.

#### THE FARM BILL

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I wish to speak to my amendment No. 1079 to the farm bill. This amendment—with Republican and Democratic support—would simply increase the authorization for the Local and Regional Procurement Program from \$40 million per year to \$60 million per year.

It would increase the flexibility for aid providers to use locally and region-

ally purchased food, which is an important element of U.S. food assistance. There is no score because we are simply increasing the authorization for this discretionary program.

The Local and Regional Procurement Program is based on a pilot program authorized in the 2008 farm bill to test projects that could help get food aid to hungry populations faster and more efficiently by sourcing food in the communities and regions closest to those in need.

USDA and Cornell University have studied the pilot program and found it has been able to provide aid quickly and efficiently while also supporting development of food markets in low-income countries. This amendment would simply increase the authorized funding level so we can invest additional resources in this successful program.

My amendment is supported by 20 groups, including American Jewish World Service, Bread for the World, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Church World Service, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, InterAction, Lutheran World Relief, Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office, Mercy Corps, Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network—MFAN—ONE, Oxfam America, Partners in Health, Save the Children, United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries, United Methodist Church-General Board of Church and Society, and World Food Program USA.

I wish to thank the cosponsors of this amendment—Republicans and Democrats—for supporting this effort, including Senators JOHANNES, DURBIN, ISAKSON, and LEAHY.

#### NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND REFORM

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise today to speak briefly about two pieces of legislation that I have introduced. They are the Educational Accountability and State Flexibility Act and the Early Intervention for Graduation Success Act. I intend to speak with my colleagues about these bills in the coming days and weeks, but I would like to take a moment now to provide an overview of my thoughts.

We have all heard from our constituents—teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, and parents—about the No Child Left Behind Act. Clearly, the law has some good things. Americans deserve accountability for how their Federal tax dollars are spent, even when they are spent in their local schools. Parents want to know their local schools can help prepare their children for the future. But No Child Left Behind went too far. My bill, the Educational Accountability and State Flexibility Act, seeks to maintain reasonable accountability to taxpayers and parents while providing greater flexibility to States

and schools to meet our children's needs and local communities' individual circumstances.

As we know, the Senate HELP Committee has again begun to address the need to reform No Child Left Behind. A markup of the Strengthening America's Schools Act began yesterday, Tuesday, June 11, 2013. I am hopeful the committee can come together to reduce, not expand, the Federal government's role in our local schools. I know several of my colleagues share that hope, including Senator ALEXANDER, who offered a substitute amendment to reduce the Federal mandates in the Strengthening America's Schools Act. I voted for that amendment and others like it. Since the Alexander amendment and several similar amendments failed, I hope my colleagues will review my Educational Accountability and School Flexibility Act. It is intended to offer some ideas for continuing the conversation.

My bill would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—also known as No Child Left Behind—to do the following: No. 1: Eliminate adequate yearly progress—AYP; No. 2: Allow States to stick with an approved waiver plan if that is their choice; No. 3: Require States, not the Federal government, to determine each school's level of success in helping kids succeed based on broad, flexible parameters, publish the results, reward what schools are doing right, and help the schools that need help; No. 4: Require States to diagnose why a school is not improving to help fix what is wrong in a way that will work for that school and community—not implement a school turnaround model mandated by the Federal government; No. 6: Prohibit the Secretary from prioritizing or mandating any school turnaround strategy; No. 7: Prohibit the Secretary of Education from approving or disapproving a State's decisions about standards, tests, and accountability while making sure the public can access experts' opinions on the plans; No. 8: Eliminate the Federal “highly qualified teacher” requirements and let States decide what makes teachers highly effective; No. 9: Continue to ask the low-performing schools to tutor students who are not succeeding in schools; No. 10: Continue to allow public school choice as long as a higher performing public school is available and kids would not have to ride long hours on dangerous roads to get there; and No. 11: Respect the voice and expertise of our Nation's indigenous first peoples regarding what helps Native children succeed in school.

I have also reintroduced my Early Intervention for Graduation Success Act with a few changes from last Congress. I hope my colleagues will take some time to review this legislation.

This legislation would, if enacted, amend the current school dropout prevention provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It would focus attention on identifying and